

UPDATE
Africa Bureau
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Addressing population displacement in northern Central African Republic

Several thousand Central Africa Republic (CAR) nationals have found refuge in southern Chad (more than 12,500) and in Cameroon (6,500) as a result of insecurity and the deteriorating socio-economic environment in northern CAR. UNHCR and delegations from the three countries concerned met to discuss means to help prevent further displacements.

[Informal consultations in Geneva](#)

In a meeting held in the margins of the UNHCR Executive Committee (EXCOM) in October, the High Commissioner and other UNHCR senior managers in charge of Africa operations, met with the delegations of CAR, Chad and Cameroon, to discuss the humanitarian consequences of the security situation in northern CAR and ways to prevent further population displacements.

This meeting, in which the UN Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG) for CAR, Mr. Lamine Cisse participated, builds upon the cooperation established during the tripartite meeting organised in August 2005 in Yaoundé. During that meeting, the three countries called upon the international community :

- to support them in their efforts to redress the security situation in northern CAR;
- to increase humanitarian assistance;
- for UNHCR to help address the situation of refugees and those displaced by the security problems.

The meeting in Geneva took forward the process by proposing that a humanitarian and development plan be put in place for northern CAR to prevent additional population displacements.

[The "coupeurs de route" phenomenon and child kidnapping](#)

In his briefing to the participants on the security situation in northern CAR, SRSG Cisse underlined that the main cause of general insecurity and subsequent refugee movements to neighbouring Chad and Cameroon has been the so-called "coupeurs de route" phenomenon. These groups of armed bandits, who attack the population and rob them, target farmers and herders and kidnap children for ransom. They usually operate in northern CAR along the borders with Cameroon and Chad and seem motivated by financial gain. The prevailing climate of insecurity is aggravated by the

tensions between cattle herders and farmers over access to land. CAR farmers complain that herders, especially those from neighbouring Chad, do not respect the traditional grazing routes and destroy their crops.



Refugees arrive with a canoe to the shore of the river Nya, where a UNHCR field officer is waiting for them. People had to walk 17 km before crossing the river. UNHCR /B. Heger / September 2005

[Food insecurity](#)

Participants at the Geneva meeting also pointed out that the current humanitarian situation was aggravated by underlying food insecurity in the area. Indeed, UNHCR noted in September a serious spike in the refugees' under five mortality rate among the new arrivals from CAR in Chad camps, about 3-4 times above normal rates, which could partly be attributed to years of precarious living conditions, including food insecurity and poor access to basic health services in a malaria infested area. In addition, security risks have discouraged farmers from cash crop production thus causing a significant decrease in availability of food and overall economy activity.

[Need for a strong response to redress the security situation](#)

Some measures have been taken to improve the security situation since the Yaoundé meeting, including the deployment of CAR armed forces in the border areas, supported by the *Force multinationale de la Communauté économique des Etat de l'Afrique centrale* (FOMUC-CEMAC forces) in northern CAR, the organisation of joint military operations and reinforced information-sharing mechanisms. At the same time, the delegations pointed out that some major constraints still hamper rapid action, such as lack of logistics capacity, communication equipment and insufficient road infrastructure.

UNHCR is deeply preoccupied with the likelihood that the current security situation in northern CAR may lead to further major influxes into Chad, and possibly to Cameroon, and has welcomed the three countries' efforts to address insecurity in the sub-region. If not addressed adequately, the risk would be an unmanageable number of refugees and IDPs leading to a humanitarian crisis.

[Need for targeted development interventions to prevent further displacement and facilitate the sustainable return of refugees](#)

The situation prevailing in northern CAR shows the urgent need to focus on preventive action to avoid further displacements of civilians and to prepare for the return of refugees and IDPs. The delegations, the SRSR and UNHCR formulated several recommendations to address the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in northern CAR. First, there is a need to reinforce information-sharing mechanisms among the three countries; second, it was recommended to increase humanitarian assistance, under the leadership of UNHCR, to CAR refugees and to the population in northern CAR where basic services and food production have collapsed. Improved availability of food in CAR could indeed help prevent further population movements. In that regard, the delegations agreed that a regional humanitarian and development plan needs to be established, drawn up specifically for northern CAR where the economy, largely dependant on cotton production, has collapsed.

In particular, some attention should be given to the Markounda area, where the revitalisation of the industrial sector would help combat youth unemployment. This plan will be developed by the UN Country Teams (UNCT) from the three countries. A meeting will be held between the three governments, the *Bureau d'appui des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République Centrafricaine* (BONUCA) and the UNCT agencies from the three countries to finalise the plan. The meeting will be facilitated by UNHCR.

UNHCR welcomes the forthcoming mission of the African Union to Southern Chad from 27 October to 1st November to assess the humanitarian situation in Gore and Danamadji and the border areas of southern Chad.

[Current humanitarian situation in Chad](#)

12,500 CAR nationals fled to Chad in 2005, bringing the total number of Central African refugees to 42,500. They have been accommodated temporarily in Amboko settlement (Gore), which hosts refugees from CAR since May 2003. With this new influx, Amboko settlement is now overstretched and a new site (Gondje) will be opened shortly, as agreed between the Government of Chad and UNHCR. Adequate reception of new arrivals will require development of infrastructure, services and local capacities, while UNHCR is struggling to provide the financial, human and material resources to meet the needs of the refugees. In early October, UNHCR approved an additional 2.5 million USD emergency appropriation for operations in southern Chad. Additional protection and technical staff are being deployed to reinforce our offices in Gore and Danamadji. In the meantime, dialogue with refugees is ongoing, while agricultural production and other self-reliance activities are pursued in the Amboko refugee settlement to enable refugees to attain a measure of economic self-sufficiency.

[Current humanitarian situation in Cameroon](#)

There are some 6,500 Central African refugees in the Province de l'Est (1,500) and in the Province de l'Adamaoua (5,000) in neighbouring Cameroon. These persons are from the Mbororo ethnic group, and moved with their livestock, enabling them to sustain their needs. Thus, there is for the moment no need for emergency assistance to be provided to this group, who is also well integrated in host communities for the majority of them. UNHCR is concerned by the prevailing security situation in the border area and access to refugees is limited.

[Prospects of return](#)

UNHCR is grateful for the hospitality demonstrated towards the CAR refugees in neighbouring Chad and Cameroon, and the three countries's efforts to improve the security situation in the sub-region, which is a pre-requisite before envisaging any rehabilitation interventions and the voluntary return of refugees. UNHCR stands ready to play its part in preparing a programme for the voluntary repatriation of CAR refugees who may wish to return if improved security and socio-economic conditions are met on the ground.